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Maura Elizabeth Cunningham: *Remembering Shanghai*



I used to love listening to my maternal grandmother tell family stories, and I now wish I had written them down, as when she died all of those moments and memories were permanently lost. Isabel Sun Chao and her daughter, Claire Chao, have wisely averted this mistake by collaborating on *Remembering Shanghai: A Memoir of Socialites, Scholars and Scoundrels*. Born in 1931, Isabel grew up in Shanghai's International Settlement, the third daughter of a wealthy but often troubled family. In *Remembering Shanghai*, the Chao's share Isabel's accounts of her childhood years during the city's golden age, before the Japanese occupation and then Chinese Civil War transformed the country. They also piece together the exploits of previous generations, whose members – the “scoundrels” of the book's subtitle – parlayed good connections, good timing, and a talent for schemes into wealth and status. In addition to the stories themselves, *Remembering Shanghai* is filled with vintage photos of the metropolis and the stylish Sun family in the 1930s and 1940s, as well as charming watercolors that reproduce details from Isabel's memories. Although an electronic version is available, I recommend purchasing a physical copy: the vibrant illustrations and high-quality paper make this a volume that demands to be held and leafed through, and it will find a natural home on your coffee table alongside the photography books recommended by Paul French.